

# Choosing the world's CEO

*The post of UN Secretary-General has been called the world's most impossible job. It is also one of the most important. Surely more than five countries should have a say in the process?*

As the UN's chief executive officer, the Secretary-General plays a crucial role in global affairs, driving forward the Organization's agenda and galvanising states to act in the interest of the world's citizens. He – and until now it has always been a he – works with 193 governments, leads over 40,000 staff and oversees 30 funds, programmes and agencies.

Since its founding in 1945, the UN, and with it the Secretary-General's role, have changed dramatically. But the selection process for the postholder has remained largely unaltered, meaning that today, it appears hopelessly outdated, opaque and out of step with modern hiring practices as well as the UN's own values.

There is no formal recruitment timetable or job description and candidates are not vetted. Only the Security Council has a real say in the process. It endorses a candidate

and then it is left for the rest of the UN's membership to rubber-stamp that decision.

If it is not reformed, this approach risks damaging the legitimacy of the Secretary-General role and public perceptions of the UN. Crucially, it cannot be relied upon to select the best candidate, outstanding former post-holders notwithstanding.

As this issue of *New World* makes clear, UN reform takes time, especially when amendment to the Charter, the Organization's founding document, is required. However, most of the current rules for appointing the Secretary-General are

customary or have their roots in decisions by the General Assembly, which states can choose to amend.

In order to ensure the ground is ready in time for the appointment of the next Secretary-General in late 2016, UNA-UK is calling for the debate on amending the rules to begin immediately. States should start putting forward concrete proposals for improvement, with a view to agreeing a

## INFORMAL PRACTICES: HAVE-ALWAYS-DONES

- ① The SC should put forward just one candidate to the GA
- ② The GA should make its decision through a simple majority vote
- ③ The first-term limit for the postholder is **5 YEARS** with the option of a further five
- ④ Due regard should be given to "regional rotation" and "gender equality"



## CHARTER PROVISIONS: MUST-DOS



To be nominated, a candidate must receive at least

**9** affirmative votes in the Security Council (SC), with no veto by a permanent member (China, France, Russia, UK and the US – the P5)

② The SC forwards its recommendation to the General Assembly (GA)

UN SECRETARIES-GENERAL FROM 1945 ONWARDS:



**1946-1952**  
TRYGVE LIE  
(NORWAY)



**1953-1961**  
DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD  
(SWEDEN)



**1961-1971**  
U THANT  
(MYANMAR)



**1972-1981**  
KURT WALDHEIM  
(AUSTRIA)

## Checklist for a better appointment process



### Quality

- A formal job description and selection criteria should be published
- The position should be advertised widely and nominations invited from parliaments and civil society, as well as states
- Shortlisted candidates should be vetted



### Inclusivity

- The Security Council should present more than one candidate to the General Assembly so that the wider UN membership has real choice
- Candidates should make public presentations and hold debates in the General Assembly ahead of the appointment decision



### Accountability

- Candidates and member states should pledge to refrain from making promises regarding other senior UN appointments
- The General Assembly should consider the idea of a single, potentially longer, term for the post, to reduce re-election campaigning



There is no shortage of reform proposals nor examples of best practice, including from within the UN itself. States have recognised the need for change. Public pressure is essential for words to become actions, and for governments to realise the urgency of the situation



### Equality

- Qualified female and male candidates should be included in equal numbers – a practice already in place for other senior UN appointments
- Country of origin should not be a bar – qualified candidates from all regions should be encouraged to stand

process and timetable in 2015. This would leave time for meaningful engagement, and also have symbolic value, as a signal reform to mark the UN's 70th anniversary.

Global cooperation is needed more than ever. From climate change to terrorism to cyber-security, the problems facing the world transcend national borders. An

effective Secretary-General can provide leadership, stimulate action on the solutions needed and forge partnerships between diverse constituencies.

The extent to which he or she can do so ultimately depends on the support of states. A more inclusive approach whereby all UN member states have the

opportunity to provide real input would help to build the groundwork for this. Meanwhile, public engagement and confidence in the process, would go some way to reconnecting ordinary people with the promise of the UN, and building belief in a Secretary-General who can truly represent their hopes and concerns.

## Who's next?



**1982-1991**  
JAVIER PÉREZ  
DE CUÉLLAR (PERU)



**1992-1996**  
BOUTROS BOUTROS-  
GHALI (EGYPT)



**1997-2006**  
KOFI A. ANNAN  
(GHANA)



**2007-PRESENT**  
BAN KI-MOON  
(SOUTH KOREA)